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The Migrant Economy and Marriage in the Republican Era

Apart from the military legacies of the Taiwan-China conflict from the Cold War era, nowadays the landscapes of Kinmen impress visitors from outside through various built edifices from imperial times and numerous grand *yanglou* (Western-style houses) mostly built in the 1920s and 1930s (see Figure 1.1). The heritage of the imperial epoch, such as the ancestral halls (*jiamiao* or *zongci*) of local patrilineages and memorial arches in honour of chaste widows (*zhenjie paifang*), epitomizes the imperial vision of a patriarchal family-based social order. The *yanglou* built by local men who achieved tremendous success abroad, especially in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, signify Kinmen's first encounter with modernity in conjunction with China's political transition from a hereditary monarchy to a republic. This chapter explores how this wave of modernity brought about by the migrant economy stimulated the contention between conservative and progressive visions of the future that people wanted to achieve through marriage. With historical and ethnographic material representing different actors' perspectives, I discuss how kinship practices and men's migration co-produced new arrangements of marriage and managing a patrilocal household, and how women, rather than being mere victims of patriarchy, asserted and protected their ways of life.

The coexistence of the above two kinds of architecture constructed in different times is not merely a superimposition of different temporal layers or past residues enfolded in the unilineal progress of time. Rather, I suggest, this coexistence inspires us to consider heterogeneous spatial-temporal experiences that came together, clashed or merged with each other, and reconfigured patterns of marriage in the age of men's mass emigration. In tandem with the recent surge of interest in time and temporality in migration studies (Baas and Yeoh 2019; Barber and Lem 2018), historian Shelly Chan (2018) shifts attention to fragmented and multiple

Endnotes for this chapter begin on page 43.

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Figure 1.1. An unused *yanglou* in the town of Jincheng, Kinmen, 2010. © Hsiao-Chiao Chiu.

temporalities that have been sidestepped in previous historical studies of Chinese diaspora focusing primarily on spatiality. In her exploration of Chinese history through the lens of the diaspora from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Chan uses 'diaspora time' and 'diaspora moments' to conceptually distinguish different temporalities (2018: 12–13). 'Diaspora time' depicts the diverse, ongoing ways in which migration influenced the lifeworlds of individuals, families and communities. A 'diaspora moment' occurred when diaspora time converged with other temporalities and produced broader repercussions, especially responses from powerful leaders or political authorities, such as influential Chinese merchants in Southeast Asia who supported Sun Yat-sen's 1911 Revolution and Nationalist China's anti-Japanese war effort. In this chapter, I borrow Chan's concept of diaspora time to refer to the period in which the migrant economy reshaped the local world of Kinmen. But instead of momentous encounters, my focus is on the conjunctures of different spatial-temporal experiences of ordinary people in Kinmen and their fellow islanders abroad that provoked anxieties, contestations and re-imagination of marriage and social futures.

The diaspora time of Kinmen started in the late nineteenth century and ended in 1949 when the Chinese Civil War resulted in the obstruction of the islanders' transnational mobility. The local world in this diaspora time was composed of larger and smaller territorialized patrilineal communities. As mentioned in this

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book's Introduction, these patrilineal communities had produced numerous Confucian scholar-officials who promoted the popularization of state ideology in their natal communities in late imperial times. This state ideology, tracing back to the resurgence of Confucian teachings generally known as Neo-Confucianism in the Sung dynasty (tenth to thirteenth centuries), included ritual etiquette and moral norms defining a person's proper conduct and interaction with others, such as a woman's chastity. In the first section of this chapter, drawing on historical material and historians' studies, I explain the popularization of an imperial vision of a patriarchal family-based social order featuring the protection of female virtue in Kinmen. This helps to illuminate how this imperial vision still dominated spatial-temporal experiences of many Kinmen islanders following the modernization brought about by the remittance economy and exerted great pressure on many women with regard to their fidelity to their absent husbands.

Most of the material discussed in this chapter focuses on the latter stage of Kinmen's diaspora time between 1920 and 1949 – a period which witnessed the emergence of progressive visions of marriage following China's transition into a republic in 1912. Though the exact number of migrants across the world during this diaspora time is difficult to verify, the local gazetteer published in 1968 supposed the number to be remarkable given the sharp decrease in Kinmen's population from 79,357 in 1915 to 49,650 in 1929 (Kinmen xian wenxian weiyuanhui 1968: 97). These migrants mostly relied on their kin connections to decide their destinations and occupations. For example, in Singapore which received a large number of men from Kinmen, new migrants followed their relatives to participate in piloting different kinds of boats (e.g. sampan, twakow, motor sampan) and porterage along the Singapore river (Chiang 2010). With the savings they accumulated, some migrants collaborated to establish their own businesses. Anthropologists have scrutinized the significance of kinship in informing and organizing such transnational migration (Oxfeld 1993; Watson 1975), and more recently transnational corporation (Rofel and Yanagisako 2019; Yanagisako 2002, 2013). This chapter will not go into the relation between kinship and transnationalism but will examine male migrants' marriages in light of the constitutive power of kinship and marriage underlined in this scholarship (Yanagisako 2013), and in relation to emerging political discourses surrounding marriage in the Republican era.

Following the establishment of the ROC in 1912, criticism of Confucian traditions that emerged in the late Qing era became more vigorous among young urban intellectuals and, through newspapers and magazines, grew into nationwide campaigns known as the New Culture Movement in the late 1910s.[1] The Western conjugal family ideal (*xiao jiating*, lit. small family), which promoted marriage by choice and the economic and emotional independence of the individual from the family, was advocated to replace the traditional family. The reformers believed that the conjugal family, which encouraged productivity, independence and civic

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virtue, was the key to the strength of Western countries. Women's roles were underlined by the New Culture advocates in reconfiguring the familial and societal order. By moving women out of the inner sphere and educating them, male reformers hoped that these new women would make satisfactory companions for their modern husbands and raise their children with modern knowledge for the sake of a stronger China and its bright future (Glosser 2003). According to the local gazetteer edited in the early Republican era, some changes that the New Culture Movement called for occurred in Kinmen. For example, bound feet lost their allure as a type of beautification for local women, and girls living in the towns started going to school instead of concealing themselves at home (Liu 1958 [1921]: 150–51). But, as we will see, women's access to education and autonomy in the choice of mate remained limited.

Set against the above context, the second section discusses what roles kinship and marriage had played in linking male migrants abroad to their families staying behind. Featuring the material drawn from publications produced by a local lineage, the third section discusses how young men receiving a Western education echoed the discourses of the New Culture Movement and turned their ideal visions of marriage into writings and into actual practices. But I also examine a dichotomous framing in these men's discourses which overlooked the transformative capacities of kinship in creating new generations and futures. The fourth section turns to the stories of migrant wives, who were left behind to take care of their marital families in Kinmen, in this diaspora time. Building on the life stories of several 'left-behind' women that were collected by Hsiang-Chin Liu (2006) and on my own ethnographic material, I discuss how these women preserved their fidelity despite the long-term absence of their husbands. Rather than fitting these women to the imperial model of female virtue, I draw on Veena Das's (2012, 2018a, 2018b) thesis about 'ordinary ethics' to suggest an alternative understanding of these women's moral striving. The material discussed in this chapter altogether reveals the growing contention between conservative and progressive visions of marriage, where we can detect the transformative capacities of kinship in contributing to a move of societal change through investing in male offspring's upward mobility.

The Imperial Vision of Social Order and Female Virtue

This section summarizes the historical formation of the idea of female virtue, including strict observance of sex segregation and chaste widowhood, in imperial China to explicate why many women in Kinmen in the Republican era complied with the conservative arrangements of marriage and gendered roles that I discuss later. Historians of China have scrutinized the interconnections between marriage, women's sexuality and the maintenance of a patriarchal family-based social order

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in imperial times (Ebrey 1993; Mann 1991, 2011). To maintain this social order, the imperial governments promoted and rewarded the virtue of female chastity on the one hand and punished the offenders of this virtue on the other. Even though widow chastity had long been praised by the imperial court and was legally sanctioned in the Yuan dynasty (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), it was in Ming and Qing times that chaste widowhood escalated into a cult and gained systematic legal support, state sponsorship and widespread social prominence (Birge 1995; Mann 2011). The Ming and Qing governments disseminated the value of chastity in towns and villages through strengthening the institution of imperial testimonials (*jingbiao*) honouring moral exemplars across the empire. The women who had the court honour of *jingbiao* conferred upton them were privileged to be commemorated in government-financed memorial shrines and arches.

This protection of women's chastity implied the confinement of sexual activity to marriage. As such, men unable to get married were perceived as threats to the social order and patriarchal stability. Sommer (2000, 2002) argues that, especially during the High Qing era (late seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries), the state's attempt to regulate sexuality has to be understood against a social background in which men outnumbered women and a remarkable number of men of lower socioeconomic strata remained unmarried. By reviewing Qing-dynasty legal case records, Sommer (2002) shows that jurists depicted the men accused of illicit sexual intercourse, including both consensual and coercive acts outside marriage, as aggressive violators of the boundaries of the sexes and of the household because a woman's social identity was defined by her relationship with her husband or father. In other words, the politico-jural concern over women's sexuality was not only to defend the state's conception of women's moral and sexual integrity but to preserve the stability of the patrilineal families and the social order in general.

The strict separation of the sexes which worked to sustain the vision of a patriarchal order was not only reinforced by the state but also supported by ordinary families. To guarantee a woman's virtue, a family carefully prevented her having any contact with the outside world and she was taught to do womanly work (namely, to work with her hands inside the home, as a spinner, weaver or embroiderer) (Bray 1997). A sex-gender system revolving around cloistered women was elaborated and espoused by people of divergent social statuses in the nineteenth century. As Mann puts it, 'whether scholars, cultivators, artisans, or merchants, the ability of a family to cloister women, train them for womanly work, and place them in a respectable marriage was a crucial marker of status' (2011: 7).

In Kinmen, there are three memorial arches of chastity (*zhenjie paifang*) granted by the Qing emperor in the nineteenth century (see Figure 1.2). The local gentry and literati joined in the state's moral campaigns by documenting these chaste women in the genres of local gazetteers, written genealogies, biography and poetry. In these records, the women honoured were placed in the categories

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Figure 1.2. A memorial arch of chastity in the town of Jincheng, Kinmen, 2018. © Hsiao-Chiao Chiu.

of the 'faithful' (*jie* or *jiexiao*) and 'martyred' (*lie*). A 'faithful woman' meant a widow who never remarried and fulfilled her filial obligation towards her husband's family; a 'martyred woman' meant a widow who took her own life to follow her husband in death. Many martyred women were still young, between their late teens and early twenties, when they committed suicide.

Notably, many of these faithful and martyred women were from the families of commoners rather than elite families. The local gazetteer noted that local women strictly adhered to the separation of the sexes in their everyday lives: girls avoided going out after they reached the age of ten and spent their time at home doing spinning and weaving (Lin 1993 [1882]: 395). This quotidian observance of the sexual boundary seemed to lay the ground for numerous women to choose chaste widowhood or suicide following their husbands' death as the ultimate realization of their female virtue. Many widows also made a difficult living through womanly work at home and they were thus kept away from sexual intrusion. Some women, who had not borne children before their husbands died, not only preserved their chastity but also attempted to continue their husband's family line by adopting a little girl and arranging an uxorilocal marriage for her in the future.

Given that the historical documents that I found were all written by educated men who might emphasize the efficacy of Confucian teachings, one may wonder to what extent local women took the virtue of chastity seriously. The cases of 'faithful maidens' – meaning a young woman expressing her loyalty to her deceased betrothed by living out her life as a widow (*zhennü*) or commit-

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ting suicide (*lienü*) – in Kinmen and throughout China suggest women's general identification with this virtue.[2] Historian Weijing Lu (2008: 14) argued that what motivated these young women's decisions, regardless of their families' class and their degree of education, was the intertwining of orthodox Confucian values and ideas of *yi* (honour-bound duty) and *qing* (romantic love, feeling) which were widely celebrated in literature and popular theatre. These feelings of *yi* and *qing* were also related to the common practice of child betrothal: betrothed at a very young age, a girl had grown used to viewing herself and being treated as a member of her fiancé's family long before the wedding (Lu 2008: 144–56). Drawing on such faithful maidens' own writings, principally poetry, and biographies of faithful maidens composed by men who knew their subjects personally, Lu argues that these young women, rather than passive followers or victims of Confucian ideology, were passionate actors whose lives were complicated by duty, love, aspiration and fatalism (2008: 15–17). They might use various ways to gain permission from their late fiancés' parents to join their families, and establish authority in these difficult situations.[3] Lu's original discussion on these faithful maidens directs our attention to women's own feelings, volition and choice of life behind their devotion to the protection of their absent husbands' families, as I discuss in the latter part of this chapter.

Marriage in the Context of Mass Men Working Abroad

When asked about the choice of mate before 1949, my elderly informants in Kinmen answered intuitively that almost all marriages at that time were decided by parents, in the form of arranged marriage or little daughter-in-law (*tongyangxi*, meaning a girl being adopted at birth or in childhood to be the wife of her adoptive parents' son in the future when both children grew up). For example, a female informant told me that her parents' marriage (in the 1930s) was exclusively decided by her grandfather, who was a renowned artisan from a prestigious family. When her grandfather visited a village for work, he heard about a pretty young woman in that village who was skilled at weaving and worked hard to provide for the family because of her father's early death. The grandfather viewed this woman as an ideal bride for his eldest son. Without informing his son beforehand, he sent a matchmaker to the woman's family to ask her mother's permission for the marriage. This kind of scenario was common among local marriages at the time despite the absence of the groom who was working abroad. However, rather than merely a replication of marital tradition, I suggest that such parental arrangement for their migrant son's marriage was part of kinship's constitutive power and closely related to the anxieties about preserving the patriline engendered by transnational migration.

For the men who planned to work abroad or had been abroad for a while, their marriages were of great concern to their parents. As my senior interlocutors put

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it, most migrants had not thought about establishing permanent residence overseas before their departure; neither had their parents. Probably in order to link their sons to the home, many parents found brides for their sons before they left. Lin Ma-Teng, an expertise in local history in his mid-seventies, told me that his grandmother found a *tongyangxi* for his uncle, who was just thirteen years old at that time and preparing to work in Singapore. By doing so, the grandmother also acquired an adopted daughter to accompany her and help with household chores. When this uncle turned eighteen years old in the 1930s, the grandmother urged him to hurry back by writing several letters, in which she overcame her illiteracy by using drawings to indicate a wedding. But returning was not easy for a low-paid labourer, so this man had to borrow money from his fellow countrymen for the journey back home. This instance illustrates a sense of uncertainty caused by the disjuncture between different spatial-temporal experiences of migrant sons and the parents they had left behind at a time when transnational communications were difficult. The negative imaginings of their son's permanent absence triggered the parents' creative use of the existing form of *tongyangxi* and overcome the difficulty of communication.

Similar forms of parental intervention in a migrant son's marriage were also found across *qiaoxiang* (the homeland of overseas Chinese) in Fujian and Guangdong, which were characterized by many well-organized patrilineal communities like those found in Kinmen. Based on his extensive survey in Fujian and Guangdong in 1934–1935, sociologist Da Chen (2011 [1939]: 133–38) notes that the extended family, with three or more generations living together, remained common. Values of ancestral reverence, continuation of the patriline, and cooperation between lineage brothers were also upheld. Migrants' parents contributed to the preservation of the patrilineal family by making every effort to ensure their sons' marriages with native women. Even in a very poor family, parents saved a portion of their son's modest remittances for the expenses of his marriage to a bride they found for him (Chen 2011 [1939]: 150–51). It was not only the conservative vision of marriage with the aim of preserving the patriline but also the anxieties and uncertainties caused by young men's absence that had driven parents to try their best to anchor their son's attention and future to the natal home.

Local men working abroad not only triggered their parents' anxieties, but also generated a stimulus to the local marriage market regarding the association of migration and wealth. Many relevant stories can be found in a bulletin called *Xianying* (it also has an English name *Shining*, used hereafter) established by the Xue lineage in Kinmen in 1928, with funding mainly from the lineage's overseas members.[4] Given its function to exchange news between overseas sojourners and their families in the homeland, news about a returnee's matchmaking, announcements of an engagement or a marriage, and the holding of a wedding accounted for a remarkable proportion of *Shining*'s total publications. There were

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numerous news reports in *Shining* showing the popularity of young migrants as marital candidates in the local marriage market. One news item describes how a young migrant's return to find a bride attracted numerous matchmakers' proposals and, finally, thirty-two women of different characteristics were introduced to him (*Xianying* 2006: 1760). Some of these news reports mentioned the occupation of the migrant under discussion, sometimes with information about his economic competence, which arguably aroused the imagination of those staying behind about the wealth that a migrant could earn abroad.

Marrying migrants seemed to have become a social fashion across *qiaoxiang* in south China (Chen 2011 [1939]; Hom 2010; Oxfeld 2005). It was not only the bride's parents but also the bride herself who agreed to the marriage not because of an in-depth knowledge of the groom but for his migrant status. In one woman's recollection of accepting marriage to a migrant working in Singapore chosen by her parents in the early 1940s, she said that 'I was like a blind person not knowing him being lame or paraplegic, and pleased to marry a migrant' because 'all people here at that time thought that it was good to marry a migrant' (Liu 2006: 118). However, this fashion of marrying migrants resulted in numerous unfortunate marital stories because not all of the migrants were able to realize their goal of making a fortune abroad and returning home. There is a proverb circulated in Kinmen '*liuwang, sanzai, yihuitou*' meaning that out of ten men going abroad, six died, three stayed overseas, and only one returned home, which suggests the cruel reality that many migrants and their families eventually confronted. I will revisit this topic in the fourth section on migrant wives' marital experiences.

Educated Men's New Visions of Marriage and National Futures

The publication *Shining* is a representation of Kinmen's exposure to Western knowledge and modernity. Its appearance in 1928 was suggestive of the fruitful results of many migrants' years of hard work and eventual success abroad. These successful migrants returned home to build their grand *yanglou*, renovate their lineages' ancestral halls, and carry out the modernization of local society including aspects of education, public security and public hygiene (Chiang 2011). *Shining* and other newsletters funded by these migrants indexed the aspiration of a group of young men who had received Western education for their homeland to transform into a strong modern state compatible with Western powers.[5] Based on the material from *Shining*, I discuss below these educated men's attempts to challenge the Confucian-cum-patriarchal traditions through articulating new visions of marriage and national futures.

Shining, which started as the newsletter of a village-owned primary school also funded by overseas members of the Xue lineage, included school news and writ-

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ten works by students. *Shining* revealed that girls could attend school (and they usually performed very well in their studies) and how they could become conscious of the constraints and inequalities imposed on them. For example, a female student of a higher grade (who seemed to be in her mid-teens) expressed her frustration in a short article because her wish to further her studies was objected to by her parents, who were 'old-fashioned people living in the nineteenth century'. As she foresaw no possibility of advancing her education, which was deemed by her to be the only way for a woman to attain independence, she despaired: 'It might have been better if I had never learned to read' (*Xianying* 2006: 126–27).[6]

Though the editors of *Shining* and most contributors were men, they advocated ideas of gender equality, women's emancipation, and marriage based on free choice and love through writing in various genres. The first chief editor of *Shining*, Shi-Wu, who was also the school's principal, observed rural parents' biased views about their daughters' education. In an essay, he claimed that the migrants' remittances were gradually ruining the society of Kinmen, particularly in moral terms: 'In the eyes of men, women were like toys. [The aim] of a migrant's family marrying in a woman was to gain one more prostitute [for men]' (*Xianying* 2006: 1626). He also bemoaned the fact that the New Culture Movement only had a limited effect on Kinmen because, according to his observations, parents sent their daughters to school to elevate their daughters' value in the marriage market with a view to requesting a greater sum of bridewealth from wealthy migrants in marriage negotiations (*Xianying* 2006: 1627). The articles by the female student and Shi-Wu instantiate shared views among Chinese reformers at the time in which women's education was treated as an index of a society's progression into modern civilization, and the 'traditional family' appreciating education's symbolic value of facilitating a woman's hypergamy was criticized as being reactionary and materialistic.

Several essays authored by men in *Shining* painted pictures of new futures by contrasting traditional marital practices with their new visions of marriage. For example, Jing-Xin, a highly-educated man residing in Southeast Asia, wrote an essay to argue against the old marital customs including parental authority over children's marriages (*Xianying* 2006: 2041–45). He criticized people's obsession with the formalism of traditional marital ritual in Kinmen, advocating the couple's genuine love (*ai*) for each other as the core of a marriage. Despite these educated men's critiques of the patriarchal repertoire on paper, their visions of a new society and national futures could hardly overturn the conservative practices focusing on preserving the patriline observed by their fellow islanders. In his reply to Jing-Xin's inquiry about his thoughts regarding marital reform, Shi-Wu expressed his sense of shame over his eventual submission:

> I could do nothing but go with the flow. I don't want to pour out my despair. I admit I am a person with no ambition, and can only stand aside

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> and send my blessing to you. Alas! Jing-Xin, I was not qualified to be counted as the vanguard of our times. I am willing to bear the sneers of those people who uphold a revolutionary spirit. Nevertheless, there is still a tiny bit of hope. In next season, for my livelihood, I may go somewhere else … I am truly desperate to leave this dead-end of [life in the] Minnan as soon as I can. (*Xianying* 2006: 2046)

Shi-Wu wrote this reply to Jing-Xin when he was approaching graduation from Xiamen University. From other news items in *Shining*, we know that Shi-Wu married a school teacher in Kinmen, whom he had befriended during a long intellectual exchange, and he did leave for Singapore after marrying (*Xianying* 2006: 1847, 2121–22). Shi-Wu ‘s marriage took the form of *tongju*, which was also adopted by his fellow villagers as shown in several news items in *Shining*. By comparing these news items, *tongju* seemed to mean a marriage based on the couple’s own decision and without involving traditional, elaborate marital rituals – apparently different from its contemporary connotation of a couple’s cohabitation whether or not they plan to get married. Shi-Wu appeared to put the new ideas and practices that he promoted into practice by marrying a woman of his own choice and formalizing his marriage in a much simpler way. Nevertheless, his frustration at what he considered conservative and even depraved in his homeland ultimately drove him away.

The Missing Aspect of Kinship’s Transformative Capacities

The articles from *Shining* mentioned above reveal the problems resulting from the interaction between remittance economy and traditional marital practices on the one hand, and the new visions of marriage closely linked to new futures of China that young intellectuals possessed on the other. Their arguments, as well as similar articulations by young reformers across the societies of China and Taiwan at the time, all repeatedly constructed and emphasized a dichotomy between patriarchal traditions and modern civilization. It seemed that this dichotomous framing justified their harsh critique of the ‘backwardness’ and inequalities of the ‘traditional family’, to be replaced by progressive and civilized family valuing personal autonomy and gender equality. The rhetoric formation of marriage as a political issue concerning a nation’s futures by these young intellectuals appeared to marginalize the place of kinship, which was conceived as being reactionary because of its aim of preserving the patriline. But, with an anthropological perspective of kinship, we may move beyond this dichotomous framing to reconsider what role kinship practices had played in enabling these men to receive a Western education and advocate the modernization of their society.

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In her discussion of how Italian family firms survive in today's very competitive global market by turning themselves into transnational corporations, Yanagisako (2019: 232) highlights another meaning of 'generation' – that is, 'creation' – beyond the habitual association of generation with intergenerational transmission. Rather than employing a model of biological reproduction in studying these firms' persistence, she argues that these firms should be considered as kinship enterprises involving constant reassessment and reformulation of their goals and strategies. This transformative process involved the incorporation of modern management techniques and organizational forms into their firms, through sending children to pursue degrees in business and finance, information technology, marketing and economics, in order to forge a modern family capitalism, which might lead to the generation of new firms following the demise of old ones. These transformative capacities of kinship were actually intrinsic to the 'traditional Chinese family', which, in Kinmen, had produced several scholar-officials from agrarian families in late imperial times. For families of different conditions, the goal of reproducing the family might not be about making sons follow their fathers' careers but mostly about cultivating sons, especially talented ones, to gain a higher social status so as to *guang zong yao zu* (to glorify their ancestors). Marriage served as a key institution of reproducing a patrilineal group not only by procreation of male descendants but also by enhancing social status through building alliance with affines of compatible status.

Similar kinship logic was implied in several news items about marriage throughout the publications of *Shining*. For example, a news item describes how a young male migrant of a merchant family based abroad, through an introduction, married the daughter of a Chinese businessman also based abroad. The author noted that as these two families were both well-established merchant families with wider social networks, their wedding must be magnificent (*Xianying* 2006: 3545). This kind of 'arranged marriage' between two well-off migrant families, rather than conservative, could be supportive to their homeland's enterprises of modernization. For instance, a migrant getting married after the end of Japanese occupation of Kinmen (1937–1945) donated a sum of money from the monetary gifts that he received from his family's networks to celebrate his marriage to the publisher of *Shining*, with the wish that the money be used to purchase reading materials for children (*Xianying* 2006: 3220). The publisher of *Shining*, which had resumed in 1946 and was suffering a great financial deficit, then openly called for donations in order to continue the publication. Afterwards, there were several news items about newlyweds' donation of their monetary gifts to support the publisher and their operation of a school in their natal village. In reward, the publisher published thank-you notes in *Shining*, usually with a photo of the newlyweds dressed in Western wedding attire.

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The above-described instances suggest that the transformative capacities of kinship and marriage are an intrinsic part of the seemingly conservative aim of reproducing the patrilineal family. Acts of kinship intersected with new politico-economic circumstances to ensure the upward mobility of new generations and the preservation of the patriline, which was not necessarily opposed to the creation of a modern Chinese society. However, this is not to deny that gender inequalities and oppressive elements existed. For less resourceful migrant families, the reproduction of the patrilineal family might involve a great deal of sacrifice that women were pressured to endure.

Left-Behind Wives Leading Patrilocal Households

'We just owed each other' (*sio-khiàm-tsè*, in Hokkien), Grandma Su, as I called her, said when answering my question about her late husband, who went to Singapore a few months after the birth of their only son and died there at a young age in the early 1940s. Due to her father's work in Shanghai, Su and her three elder brothers were born there. Returning to Kinmen in the early 1920s, Su's father resettled his family in a patrilineal village other than his natal village, and they became one of the few families with different surnames (i.e. of different patrilineal lines) in that village. Su's parents gave birth to their youngest son in this new residence; both Su and her younger brother followed their parents' arrangements to marry persons belonging to the lineage dominating their residential village. Despite growing up in the same village, Su said that she barely knew anything about her future husband beforehand because at that time women rarely went outside and interacted with men.

Su gave birth to her son about one year after marriage, and then her husband suddenly decided to go to Singapore before their son's first birthday. At the age of twenty, without time to absorb her husband's abrupt decision to leave home, Su started to take on the burden of leading the household (her parents-in-law seem to have passed away before her marriage). By describing her relationship with her late husband as *sio-khiàm-tsè*, Su declined to recall anything further about her marriage. But from her son Woody, whom I befriended in 2013, I learned that Su's husband went to Singapore to earn money and he may have been killed by the Japanese army occupying Singapore during the Second World War. Woody's paternal uncle, the elder brother of his father, had worked in Singapore for a long time (and eventually established permanent residence there). He was a member of the Kuomintang (KMT) and involved in the anti-Japanese activities that the KMT organized among overseas Chinese in the 1930s and 1940s.[7] This uncle told Woody that his father might have been implicated in an anti-Japanese mission and killed by the Japanese when Woody was five years old. As such, Su's memory of her husband was understandably tenuous but also traumatic; after her statement

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above, she shook her head and was unwilling to say more. During the five years of her husband's absence, Su lived as a grass widow heading a patrilocal household. After her husband's tragic death, Su continued her life as a widow, feeding herself and her son by helping in agricultural work on a relative's farm.

Absent Husbands and Tough Wives

The patrilocal household that was sustained by a young married-in woman, as was the case of Grandma Su's, became common across *qiaoxiang* during the diaspora time. Many women of Su's generation were left behind by their migrant husbands who rarely or never returned home. These migrants' marriages to local women involving their parents' expectations and intervention constituted pressure on them as they were supposed to bear the twofold responsibilities of feeding their marital families and caring for their old parents. Besides such familial burdens, they faced expectations from the wider communities in their occasional visits to their homeland. As mentioned earlier, despite local imaginings of upward mobility and the fortune that male migrants were expected to earn overseas, there were few successful cases. Lin Ma-Teng, whom we saw earlier, said that many migrants were afraid to make a return visit due to the great expenditure that the journey involved and, more crucially, the moral pressure to prepare gifts for their families and wider social networks back home. This gift-giving not only mattered to migrants' social reputation, but also served as a token of gratitude for the small sum of money, food and necessities that they had been given on their first departure. To manifest their proper manhood in the homeland, low-paid migrants had to live very frugally in harsh conditions abroad, which undermined their manhood materially and psychologically.

Male migrants lived apart from their wives and children but the form of the patriarchal household was maintained in terms of the gendered division of labour. Men were breadwinners working abroad and sending remittances back, whereas their wives stayed at home and took care of domestic chores (Hsu 2000; Mazumdar 2003; Mckeown 2001; Shen 2012). Nevertheless, due to the conditions that male migrants encountered abroad, including disease, misfortune, second marriage and death, many men could not meet their responsibilities of providing for their families. Instead, their wives who were left behind became the backbone of their marital families economically and symbolically. Like Grandma Su, many women saw their husbands depart for Southeast Asia soon after they married or after the birth of a first child; then, suddenly, they no longer received any news or remittances from their husbands who were dead or had established another family overseas. To feed themselves, their children and probably their co-resident parents-in-law, these women started to make money through their skilled female labour at home (e.g. making textile goods of various kinds) or, like Su, by learning to do heavy agricultural work which they had never done before marriage.

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Some scholars argue that migrants' wives did not emigrate with their husbands because they played important roles in managing the family estate, including remittance-funded investment, and even generating income by labouring in productive activities of various kinds (Mazumdar 2003; Szonyi 2005). Concepts of the corporate property-holding unit or *jia* (household) economy put forward by anthropologists (e.g. Cohen 1976; Watson 1975) have been used to analyse the divided family as a strategy of maximizing a family's common economic interest. While this argument seems logical, as Szonyi (2005) admits, it is limited because many migrants from poor families actually earned little abroad and hence hardly improved their family's economic conditions, nor acquired any property. This argument also implies a teleological view of migrants and their families as instrumental and acting out of economic interest, without considering non-instrumental motives and human sentiments. The story of Madam Suhong described below exemplifies a more complicated picture of the divided family maintained by a migrant's wife.

Migrants from Kinmen were often engaged in low-paid work in Southeast Asia, but some managed to come back to ask their families to go abroad together, like Madam Suhong's husband (Liu 2006: 113–15). Suhong's husband left his pregnant wife to go to Malaysia in order to take over the role of earning money for the extended family that his elder brother had held for years. However, he failed to keep his promise to return home after three years, and he married a second wife overseas who looked after him when he was ill. When Suhong's daughter was seven years old, her husband finally came back and asked her to go with him to Malaysia. Suhong rejected the proposition because she could not leave her elderly parents-in-law behind and she worried about the burden for her husband to feed the large family including two wives and their children. Suhong never saw her husband again. Nevertheless, with a sewing machine that her husband sent home and by collaborating with female relatives in her marital family, she made a living by making and repairing clothes. In this story, narrated by Suhong herself, the divided family was not a strategy of maximizing the familial common economic interest but a difficult decision made by Suhong, based on her multiple concerns and care for others, and respected by her husband who could only offer limited economic compensation for his absence.

The decision of Madam Suhong to stay in her marriage and stay with her parents-in-law in Kinmen, as many women in similar situations did at that time, symbolically preserved the patrilineal family. They fulfilled the filial obligations, on behalf of their absent husbands, to their parents and ancestors by caring for their parents-in-law and bringing up their children, especially sons, with aspirations of their children's continuation of their patrilines in the future. They contributed to the formal and moral intactness of the patrilineal family by excluding the option of remarriage and guarding their fidelity in their everyday exposure to various

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ways of monitoring their sexuality, such as gossip and the reporting of behaviour to husbands abroad, by members of close-knit communities (Hsu 2000: 107). The story of Madam Zhou in Liu's (2006: 107–108) collection shows that she preserved her fidelity even though her husband married a second wife in Singapore. When Zhou took her adopted daughter to Taiwan to escape the Chinese Communist artillery attack on Kinmen in the late 1950s, her parents-in-law, who stayed behind, were very worried about whether she would run away with someone else. Some villagers' suspicious comments about the freedom that Zhou might enjoy in Taiwan intensified her mother-in-law's anxiety, so she sent numerous letters to hasten Zhou's return. In retrospect, Zhou said that if she had ever considered remarriage, she would have done it earlier but not after more than ten years of her husband's absence, and she would have not brought in a girl as an adopted daughter to her marital family.

Exemplars of Faithful Women and Ordinary Ethics

During my conversation with a retired school teacher about the stories of women marrying migrants before 1949 in his village, he drew an analogy between these women and the faithful widows (*jiefu*) honoured by the imperial court. These women, whom he knows personally, like those described above, became the breadwinners of their marital families due to their husbands' death, misfortunes or second marriages abroad. They preserved fidelity and fulfilled filial obligations on behalf of their absent husbands. My interlocutor commented that these women, who lived out their lives as chaste (grass) widows, deserved the award of *zhenjie paifang* (memorial arches in honour of chaste widows) granted by the President of Taiwan, had the honouring system still been in practice today.

As we have seen, the imperial vision of a patriarchal family-based social order, in which the model of faithful women was embedded, remained influential in the Republican era despite the forces of reform and modernity. This vision still significantly informed and shaped many parents' gendered upbringing of their children, the ways in which marriages were established, and the gendered division of labour in the household. One could argue that these migrants' wives' endurance of hardship and solitude – the construction of the female self in accordance with the dominant cultural paradigm – was structured by gender inequalities in various aspects. This is true but by drawing on Das's (2012, 2018a, 2018b) discussion of ordinary ethics, I reconsider these women not as mere observers or victims of patriarchal norms but as moral subjects endeavouring to make everyday life habitable. Instead of understanding these women's behaviour through the exemplar of faithful women as the above retired teacher suggested, I look at how these women sustained their lifeworlds and formed their moral subjectivities, not by escaping from the ordinary but rather by descending into it (Das 2012: 134).

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In Das's discussion of ordinary ethics, rather than viewing ethics as composed of human judgements made in relation to their ordinary practices, she proposes thinking about the ethical as being 'much more diffused into one's life lived as a whole' (2018a: 547). Here 'the ordinary' or 'the everyday' is more than routines, habits and traditional maps of social action, which have often been equated with the everyday in anthropology. Building on her readings of works of Freud, Cavell, Austin and Wittgenstein, Das proposes seeing 'the everyday as haunted by the possibilities of scepticism, a scene of trance and illusion, and of the uncanny' (2018b: 57). In this sense, the maintenance of the everyday itself constitutes an achievement, which involves innovations, improvisations and moral strivings 'to give birth to the eventual everyday from within the actual everyday' (Das 2012: 134). Given that I did not collect most of the stories presented in this chapter directly from women marrying migrants before 1949, I lack the ethnographic nuances to build on information and insights derived from my interactions with these women over an extensive period. Despite this limitation, in light of Lu's (2008) attention to faithful maidens' personal feelings as discussed previously and Das's thesis of ordinary ethics, I highlight these women's sentiments of resentment, disappointment, empathy and dignity as well as their everyday striving to make life habitable.

The aforementioned remarks of Grandma Su about her relationship with her late husband as owing each other indexes the rejection of associating her chaste widowhood with her affectionate ties with her husband, as well as her feelings of resentment but also acceptance of what had happened. Madam Wang, a respondent in Liu's (2006) collection of oral histories, made a similar statement: 'My husband rarely contacted me after he went abroad (and had a second marriage there), so I barely had *zhen qingyi* (genuine affection) for him' (2006: 112). She stayed in this marriage because she did not feel it was right to leave her mother-in-law, who had become a widow at a young age, and she was concerned about the possible damage that a divorce would do to her natal family's reputation. Like Madam Suhong and many of her female coevals, Wang attributed one of her reasons for staying in her marital home to her care and empathy for her widowed mother-in-law, rather than to an articulation of a daughter-in-law's filial piety to her parents-in-law as demanded by the patriarchy. What made this life full of hardship generated by poverty, a husband's irresponsibility, and a mother-in-law's sometimes bad treatment bearable to Wang was, as she herself said, that 'I was wholeheartedly devoted to bringing up my only son' (Liu 2006: 112).

Though Grandma Su did not explicitly articulate her son's importance to her, the strength of their ties was illustrated in her son Woody's words to me. Woody told me several times that, if not for his concern about his widowed mother, he would have pursued a military career: it is conventionally deemed that such a career should be avoided by a man because the potential sacrifice of his life threatens his filial duty to his parents and ancestors (see Stafford 1995). I propose to

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read Grandma Su and Madam Wang's lives as enduring periods in which the upset caused by their husbands' disappearance was enfolded in their everyday striving to sustain their families and rear their children, through which they constituted their moral subjectivities. This understanding avoids an over-hasty reduction of their lives to a mere realization of the patriarchal model of female virtue.

The Confucian teachings of female virtue appeared to remain effective in shaping the social expectations of women's lifelong fidelity to their husbands despite the latters' irresponsibility and second marriages abroad. Women, whose subjectivities were shaped in their quotidian experiences of social and self-surveillance of their sexuality, inevitably viewed the preservation of fidelity as crucial to their ethical existence in the world. In the early 1950s when the KMT troops from China occupied part of Kinmen civilians' houses (see next chapter), the father-in-law of Madam Zhou, whom we saw earlier, stayed all day in the main room of the traditional house, which faced the courtyard, to monitor the soldiers' movements. Zhou herself also avoided coming out of her bedroom (Liu 2006: 108). Women's everyday prudence in safeguarding their proper distance from men was not just their response to social expectations about their fidelity but, more importantly, mattered to their self-recognition of their moral integrity and dignity. When replying to a question about remarriage, Liu's respondent, Madam Li, claimed that 'no matter how hard the life was, I never considered marrying another man' because '[I] had not done anything wrong, how could it be to marry two [men]' (Liu 2006: 125–26).

Madam Zhou's and Li's assertion of their moral and sexual integrity implied their self-distinction from other widows who remarried soldiers coming from China in 1949. In retrospect, my elderly informants commented that these women had no choice but to remarry because of extreme poverty. But this kind of empathy was not readily applied to those women back then. Auntie Lu, as I called her, told me that her late husband could not forgive his mother, a widow with no support who remarried a soldier to Taiwan in the early 1950s. Lu's husband was in his early teens at the time, and refused to go with his mother to Taiwan. He even refused to meet his mother after he established his own family. Lu had served as a mediator between her husband and mother-in-law. She sent her eldest son to spend some time in Taiwan with her mother-in-law, who indulged this grandson with love and financial help with his education. These episodes, recounted from a third-party's perspective by Auntie Lu, reveal the difficult feelings that her mother-in-law and husband experienced over decades. With no easy and perfect solution to the mental trauma that she caused to her son, Lu's mother-in-law tried to make her life habitable by mending her relationship with her son by various attempts and mediation from her daughter-in-law.

The above-mentioned stories of women who preserved their fidelity and women who remarried altogether reveal their great efforts undertaken to keep

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their lives going in ways that were bearable and felt ethically right to them. Their stories were nicely captured by Das's words that 'our sense of life as a whole as ethical involves us in finding ways of containing these disappointments and not allowing them to be converted into a curse on the world' (2018a: 541).

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on marriage in Kinmen in a period featuring the intersections of temporalities of mass male emigration and transition of political regimes, during which marital reform was proposed as a crucial approach to modernizing China. Traditional arranged marriage, which remained dominant during this period, was not merely the result of the powerful influence of Confucian traditions or ordinary people's resistance to change. Instead, I argue that it was the constitutive power of kinship involving actors' practices to create a future in line with local people's expectations of preserving the patriline. Marriage played an important role in realizing this conservative aim by linking the male migrants to their natal homes or building alliance with affines of compatible status.

Despite the prevalent conservative arrangements of marriage during the diaspora time, the core work of kinship in creating the next generations involved constant interaction with new politico-economic circumstances in order to ensure the upward mobility of male offspring and to glorify the ancestors by their achievements. This opened up opportunities to animate changes in society from the intimate sphere of kinship. The migrant economy built on kinship networks nourished a group of young men who had experiences of sojourning abroad and received Western education and ideas. The differences between these educated men and their kin left behind in their spatial-temporal experiences led to the rising contention between conservative and progressive visions of marriage. Echoing the New Culture Movement, they articulated new visions of marriage and national futures and tried to put these new visions into practice. Though many of these young men's struggles against patriarchal conservatism ended in failure and feelings of frustration, their endeavours to break with tradition, such as in the adoption of new forms of formalizing a marriage (e.g. *tongju*), signalled the possibility of carving out alternative paths. Rather than reinforcing the dichotomous framing between traditional and modern marriage that these male intellectuals devised, I have drawn attention to the transformative capacities of kinship in co-producing these changes and progression towards modernity.

This chapter has also discussed the negative effects resulting from the conservative aim of reproducing the patrilineal family which was suffused with gender inequalities and oppressive elements, particularly the ideas revolving around women's chastity. Though the forces of reform initiated by intellectuals in Beijing reached Kinmen and had some impact in the Republican era, the patriarchal

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order still dominated many islanders' everyday lives, especially the social surveillance of women's sexuality. The obstruction to women's access to education and gainful employment outside the home confined their spatial-temporal experiences to a clear separation of the sexes, a division of inner and outer spheres, and generational hierarchy. As we have seen, many left-behind wives constantly self-regulated their sexuality and rejected remarriage, even though their husbands were dead or had second marriages abroad. Instead of viewing these women as duplicating the imperial model of chaste widowhood, I argue for an understanding of their everyday striving to make life habitable through Das's thesis of ordinary ethics. Their everyday lives, presented outwardly as their adherence to the patriarchal repertoire, were suffused with their ethical responses in their empathy towards their parents-in-law who were also left behind, their devotion to rearing their children, and their complicated feelings towards their husbands who were barely present in their marital lives.

The stories of left-behind women's everyday ethical striving and young men's struggles against patriarchal dominance in Kinmen illuminate the complicated pictures of Chinese intimate lives in the first half of the twentieth century. Moving beyond the earlier framing of the Chinese family as a property-holding entity acting on the family's common economic interest in anthropology (e.g. Cohen 1976; Freedman 1958, 1966; Watson 1982), this chapter has shown the personal emotions, desires and ethical judgements surrounding the contention between conservative and progressive visions of marriage. While the conservative aim of preserving the patriline involved gender inequalities and oppressive elements, kinship or the 'traditional Chinese family' was not entirely reactionary against change, as young reformers tended to emphasize. The practices of kinship actually joined in the creation of new social futures through adopting both old and new resources to prepare the next generations for the changing world, despite a focus on male offspring in this initial stage of the Chinese society's march towards modernity. In subsequent chapters, we will see how this constitutive power of kinship enabled families to sustain kin ties while creating diverse options of life paths for the new generations along with Kinmen's encounter with new waves of modernity.

Notes

1. It is generally agreed that Chen Duxiu's famous essay 'Call to Youth' (*Jinggao Qingnian*), published in the September 1915 issue of *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), marked the beginning of the New Culture Movement. This movement reached its zenith on 4 May 1919 when university and high-school students in Beijing initiated a protest against the Treaty of Versailles which was criticized as a secret agreement between Britain and Japan to allow the latter to take over the territories in Shandong previously controlled by Germany. The May Fourth Movement has thus become a well-known

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appellation of the New Culture Movement (see Chow 1960; Glosser 2003; Schwarcz 1986).

2. The phenomenon of faithful maiden surfaced in the thirteenth century and reached its zenith from the mid-Ming and throughout the Qing dynasty. The Qing court honoured nearly 5,000 faithful maidens who remained celibate and 1,000 who had committed suicide between 1644 and 1850 (Lu 2008: 4–5).
3. Faithful maidens who were permitted to join their late fiancés' families (so that they were prevented from committing suicide) usually faced immense challenges because their presence entailed an economic and emotional toll for the families. But they gained certain authority in individual circumstances. Some educated women served pedagogical roles for their younger female relatives by teaching Confucian classics or writing poems. Some became the primary breadwinners for the families by working in the vegetable garden or making shoes, food or other products to sell in the market, instead of womanly work at home (Lu 2008: 173–75).
4. The publication of *Shining* was suspended during the Japanese occupation of Kinmen (1937–1945) and ceased permanently in 1949. There were in total 21 issues: 15 issues in 1928–1937 and 6 issues in 1946–1949. In this book I use the collective volumes of *Shining* which includes all issues reprinted by National Kinmen Institute of Technology (upgraded and renamed as National Quemoy University in 2010) and Jushan Xue's Association in 2006.
5. There were other migrant-funded newsletters established by other villages or organizations in Kinmen in the 1920s and 1930s, but only the copies of *Shining* are well preserved to the present day (Chiang 2016).
6. All the articles in *Shining* were written in Chinese, and all the quotes from *Shining* in this chapter are my own translations.
7. Regarding overseas Chinese's involvement in Nationalist China's anti-Japanese war effort, see Kuhn (2008); Wang (1991).

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